

Sonora, Mexico

The state of Sonora occupies mainland Mexico's northwestern corner. It is Mexico's second largest state. The area was first explored in the 1530's by the Spanish, who developed mines to exploit the rich reserves of copper, gold and silver. During the 17th century, much of this vast and lonely region, as well as the neighboring Baja California peninsula, was colonized by the Jesuit missionaries.

Magdalena, about an hour's drive from the Arizona border, is an agricultural center. Early each October the city celebrates the Fiesta of San Francisco. In 1966, archeologists digging in Magdalena's plaza uncovered the grave of Father Eusebio Kino, the Jesuit priest who established 25 missions in northwestern Sonora and southern Arizona and California between 1687 and 1711. Kino was responsible for bringing the native Indians advanced farming methods as well as Christianity. The priest's bones are enclosed in glass, exactly as they were discovered, and the grave-site has been designated a national monument.

Hermosillo, Sonora's capitol, is a modern business and agricultural center. It was named after Jaliscan general José María González Hermosillo, patriot in the Mexican War of Independence from Spain.

On the Gulf of California coast is Guaymas, known for sport fishing. A short distance north-west of Guaymas is Bahía de San Carlos, which offers clear blue waters and white-sand beaches set against a backdrop of mountains and desert.

Ciudad Obregón is in the center of the fertile Yaqui Valley. Until 1924 it was called Cajeme, after a famed Yaqui chieftain of the 1880's. It is the home of contemporary buildings and a ring of storage elevators, grain mills, cotton gins and other industries.

The Presa Alvaro Obregón Dam, 35 miles northeast of Obregón on the Río Yaqui, irrigates the wheat, cotton, rice, corn, alfalfa, flax and sesame grown on 500,000 reclaims acres in the valley. Fishing and boating are possible on the reservoir, and on Lake Nainarit, west of town. Northwest and west of town are the Yaqui Indian settlements of Pótam, Vícam, Torin, Bácum, Cocorit, and Yaqui.

Alamos, a quaint, colonial town, is east of Navojoa in the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental. It dates from an early Spanish settlement. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado camped in the area in 1531. By the 1781, it had a population of 30,000. Wealth from surrounding silver mines financed the construction of elaborate colonial mansions and the establishment of a government mint. Alamos was all but abandoned by the turn of the 20th century, after the mines were depleted, but in recent years American expatriates, among others, have restored many of the town's buildings to their former glory and turned Alamos into an artist colony and vacation retreat. It's colonial atmosphere is now protected by state decree. A church dating from about 1780 is on the arcaded plaza. There is a small museum, many lovely hotels, and a miniature train that offers a tour of the city.